

To Witness the Triumph

33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time - Year C

Malachi 3:19-20a
Psalm 98:5-6, 7-8, 9

2 Thessalonians 3:7-12
Luke 21:5-19

On November 19, 2010, Harry Potter fans everywhere, having overloaded fandango with advance ticket orders, lined up around the block to see the first part of the last installment of the saga of a boy wizard and his epic battle against the powers of darkness. People, young and old, have been anticipating this film, and its conclusion this summer, ever since the book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, was published and released a little more than three years ago.

To the "non-fan" this might seem a rather foolish exercise. To begin with, the trailers, previews and images of the film already indicate a rather intense, dramatic and even scary story. With the knowledge that the second half is to be released this summer, the intensity and drama of part one will include some tragedy and will more than likely end in cliffhanger. Secondly, there will hardly be a moviegoer, especially during that first weekend of the movie's release, who has not read the book and, therefore, already knows how the story ends. Still, already knowing the outcome of the story, the excitement and anticipation has reached fever pitch as fans eagerly await the movie.

Not long ago I asked a group of children why they would be willing to sit through such a scary film, with all its apparent drama, tragedy (some beloved characters obviously die), and intensity, when they already know that good will triumph in the end. What is the point in

enduring such a long, frightening movie, the last two of a series of films, when there will be absolutely no surprise, whatsoever, as to the ultimate triumph of good over evil?

Their answer was simple, but somewhat profound. They wanted to *see* how it would be portrayed. Knowing the ultimate outcome, they are willing to endure the intensity and the scariness in order to witness, as it were, the final triumph. Having simply read about it in books, does not compare to the anticipation of actually

watching it take place, on screen, portrayed in a movie, with all the scariness and suspense leading up to it. Even children are willing to risk nightmares to see the final triumph of good, which they know will come in the end.

With the dawning of the new millennium, great anticipation arose among various religious circles regarding the End Times and the final Tribulation before the coming of Christ. Such exaggerated concerns have since waned, now that we are well beyond the

millennial threshold. Still, annually, as the Liturgical Year draws to a close and a new one begins, themes regarding the tribulations and the End Time are read during the Sunday Liturgies. In the Sunday readings Jesus warns of trying times for the Church before the coming of The End. He tells of earthly disasters, the destruction of the great Temple, wars, insurrections, false prophets leading people astray, families and friends betraying one another to persecution, some loosing heart, others being put to death;

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Christ's Eschatological Discourse

and all this only the beginning.

These readings have little resemblance to the Gospel of comfort, love and peace that our modern progressive culture has come to expect (in some circles, demand) of Christianity and its message. Indeed many seek to overlook such teachings and biblical images lest it frighten people away, or – at the very least – turn people off.

And yet, this has been, in essence, at the very heart of the Christian experience. The Temple was destroyed, our Church has experienced, and continues to experience, persecutions, rejection even betrayal by family and friends. The Church has endured great disasters (the Black Death of late medieval Europe comes to mind) and has had to face the fruits of proverbial false prophets, both within the Church and from outside, who have led people astray, victimized the vulnerable, persecuted the Church, as well as led it into periods of corruption and degradation.

And yet, we are still here. Nothing has led either to the end of the Church, nor have they ushered in of the final end of the world. All

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experiences, both the good we perpetuate and the corruption and tribulations we have endured, bring us closer to the day when Jesus will come again, and make us stronger for being His followers as we endure to see that great day.

This is because, as a people of salvation, we know how the story will end. We know that

Christ has already won the victory by his Death and Resurrection. We know that such tribulations and trials, either the result of human frailty or by proverbial “acts of God” which bring destruction and upheaval, are merely temporary, are not the end, but may only be the beginning. We endure it, with its all its intensity, scariness and drama, because we know how it will end, and we want to endure

in order to see it unfold before our eyes. For as the prophet, Daniel, reminds us - "Blessed is the one who has patience, and perseveres..." (Dn 12:12).

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